DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 021 897 UD 004 091

By- Kvaraceus, William C.

THE URBAN SCHOOL AND THE DELINQUENT.

Yeshiva Univ., New York, N.Y. Ferkauf Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Pub Date 3 May 66

Note- 17p.; Published in the Proceedings of the Annual Invitational Conference on Urban Education (5th, May 3, 1966).

Available from- Yeshiva University, Ferkauf Graduate School, 55 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10003 ($2.50)

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.

Descriptors- BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS, *DELINQUENTS, FAILURE FACTORS, LITERATURE REVIEWS, *SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT, SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITY, SCHOOL ROLE, *SELF CONCEPT, SELF ESTEEM, SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT, STUDENT SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP, *STUDENT TEACHER RELATIONSHIP, TEACHER ROLE, *URBAN SCHOOLS

As both American and European studies suggest, large-city schools are increasingly responsible for the rising rate of delinquency and social maladjustment among youth. Too often urban schools encourage pupils to renounce their individual differences and submit to external controls and group pressures. Many pupils feel frustrated and agressive and may participate in delinquent gangs to maintain a nearly destroyed ego. Instrumental to the role of the school as an ego-supporting institution is the relationship between teachers and students, which can be especially constructive if the teacher himself has an adequate self-concept, is responsive, and has a positive understanding of his role despite the bureaucracy within which he must work. The school should also provide students with immediate rewards for their efforts. Success experiences might be generated by offering the student a variety of educational tasks appropriate to his needs and interests. The urban pupils' need for success might also be met through small, programed units of instruction. (LB)

The Urban School and the Delinquent[1]

WILLIAM C. KVARACEUS
Tufts University, Medford, Mass.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

In the rural America that Booth Tarkington described, Penrod viewed school "as a place of confinement envenomed by mathematics." This now has been modernized, and to mathematics has been added a good dose of science, language, and literature. In the urbanized America of Salinger's Holden Caulfield, the neurotic version of the middle-class delinquent complains: "They give guys the axe frequently at Pencey. It has a very good academic reputation, Pencey. It really does."

It is true that many schools are saving their academic reputations by selling the reluctant and recalcitrant learners down the river. Writing of his own inner-city school experience, James Baldwin confides:

> School began to reveal itself, therefore, as a child's game that one could not win, and boys dropped out and went to work. My father wanted me to do the same. I refused, even though I no longer had any illusions about what an education could do for me.

Many city youngsters who become delinquent come to school lacking any poker chips with which to enter the classroom game, and those who drop out must face perennial unemployment. Children and youth

ED021897 UD 004 091

[1] This paper has been drawn from a forthcoming volume, Anxious Youth: Dynamics of Delinquency, Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., to be published in the summer of 1966. The paper was presented at the Fifth Annual Invitational Conference on Urban Education, Ferkauf Graduate School of Education, Yeshiva University, New York City, May 3, 1966.

who live in the big city and who attend schools in crowded urban centers tend to be more exposed, vulnerable, or susceptible to social inadaptation and delinquency, according to a number of recent studies reported in many countries including the U.S.A.

Evidence of the delinquent gang as a fast-growing social, urban institution is provided in the French investigations by Ceccaldi[2], who reports that in the period between 1950 and 1958 a 124% increase in gang delinquencies was noted in cities of more than 100,000 population, whereas cities with less than 50,000 showed only a 28% increase for the same period. A finer breakdown of figures for small and large communities reaffirmed a significant correlation between gang delinquency and the factors of compressed and industrialized areas, although the correlation does not represent a straight-line relationship.

In a controlled follow-up study of delinquents in Finland, Saari[3] has reported that the recidivists included the highest proportion of moving individuals and also that such persons tended to move to more densely populated districts. The city drew them like a magnet.

In a Norwegian study by Christie[4] in which 1,000 young offenders were compared with a sample of their nondelinquent counterparts, it was noted that two thirds of the offenders had no education beyond a minimal level. Yet the offenders lived in the densely populated parts of the country where there was easy access to extended education and better schools. It was also noted that school achievement and marks were considerably lower for the offenders. Christie presses home the fact that since the school agency has taken over many of the functions

of the family in modern, industrialized Norwegian society, these differences in school background between offenders and nonoffenders become a matter of special reference in view of the similar home and family backgrounds from which the groups came.

In Poland in 1962[5], I found the current rate of delinquency per 1,000 boys 10-17 years of age to be 5. 1 in the rural areas. But in cities of less than 50,000, it was 14.4 per thousand; and in the very large cities over 50,000 it soared to 22.9 per thousand. Almost half of all Polish delinquents - 44.2% - resided in cities of more than 50,000 which contained only 24.5% of the population of Poland.

In the United States trouble with pupils and sheer bigness of educational enterprise seem to go hand in hand. The National Education Association in a study of pupil misbehavior noted[6] that teachers in big school districts, in big schools, and big classes reported significantly more trouble with pupils than teachers in small districts, in small schools, and with small classes. This was one of the most definite relationships established in the study.

The big-city slant in juvenile delinquency is further accentuated by an annual report made by the Illinois Youth Commission[7]. In this state the 14 counties in which the principle industrial and urban centers are located were found to be the feeders for 91% of all boys committed in a single year to the state training school.

These research studies explicitly reaffirm the greater vulnerability, exposure, and opportunity for delinquency and social inadaption of young city dwellers; implicitly, they underscore the schools re-

sponsibility and opportunity as the one agency that constantly comes in contact with the city child and is in a strong position to assist him in his growth and adjustment.

For the many city children who come from disrupted and unstable homes, who live in neighborhoods lacking cohesiveness, whose value systems are in conflict with those of the dominant adult community, whose parents are ignorant or neglectful, who find no moral, social, or psychological roots in the neighborhood, the school generally represents the one positive and supervised experience that can steer them in the direction of personal and social well-being. The school has a singular opportunity to turn youthful energies, often pointed in destructive fashion to self and society, toward more wholesome ends. In this paper, I shall discuss the school, first, as an ego-destroying agency and, second, as an ego-supporting institution.

THE SCHOOL AS AN EGO-DESTROYING INSTITUTION

The urban pupil who enters the big-city school can find there a barren and empty classroom hell which in time becomes the accepted thing. Accepting their classroom hell as a way of life, hell is the only thing the youngsters can react to. I am not concerned with the lower regions of classroom hell populated by those students who are scratching, even cheating, their way into prestige colleges via "The Fourth R-- the Rate Race," as described by John Holt in last Sunday's (May 1, 1966) New York Times Magazine. That is perhaps an even more complex problem than delinquency.

Children in a big city who enter the public schools in heavily populated neighborhoods are immediately absorbed in a massive educational system. Although the big-city school system accepts all children, it does so on its own terms. These terms frequently demand some renunciation of differences - personal, social, and cultural - and a constant submission to the processes of conformity and standardization. Most schools achieve their goals at the price of some loss of privacy, personal identity, and individuality. They require a submission to external controls and to the pressures of the group; they invoke the severe competitive processes of selection and survival of the academically fit; and all too frequently they produce an artificial separation between the classroom and the life stream of everyday problems and activities.

These demands of the large-city school system may be destructive to the ego. Children and youth who are unable or unwilling to submit frequently join the ranks of the school failures, the troubled and troublesome, the truants, and the early school dropouts. They may even set up their own ego-supporting institutions in the form of the juvenile gang.

The destructive nature of the school experiences of many delinquents and socially inadapted youngsters shows up vividly in a member of comparative studies of delinquents and their nondelinquent counterparts. School case histories of delinquents reveal them to be most often in bad school posture or in bankruptcy. Their school reports indicate low achievement or failure in many subjects. They are over-age for their grade. They register a strong dislike for school and the people

who manage them. They are frequently truant. They intend to leave school as soon as the law will allow. In short, while they represent a headache for the school, the school represents an even greater headache for them. There is little evidence of status, prestige, success, security, or acceptance in the school experiences of most delinquents. What these school experiences point to is a succession of failures and sever frustrations that beget aggression toward self or toward society.

In our study of summer riots at Hampton Beach, New Hampshire, in 1965, the subjects were queried concerned their school experiences. Both those who were arrested and those who were not rated education as something highly valued. Both groups appeared to express a basic truth which had been reduced via repetition to a courteous banality. However, those who were arrested perceived themselves as having been unmotivated in school. Very few youngsters, particularly among the arrested, claimed that they had been challenged or that they had ever worked hard in school. The arrested group were also much more sensitized and conscious of changes in beach rules and regulations, to business management, and to the police patrols; and they testified to a considerable amount of stress engendered by the school.

The youngster who is most in need of help and reinforcement by the school agency is precisely the one who is most liable to reject school or to be rejected by the school. How to keep such city youngsters in school to the benefit of themselves and society should be of major concern to authorities in large urban centers. There is some evidence, for example, in the study of pupil misbehavior by the National Education

Association, that the school staff is inclined to relieve itself of the inadapted or delinquent pupil by early rejection or dismissal. In this study, almost half of the teachers and principals argued for the early expulsion of misbehaving children as a means of coming to grips with the problem. This is merely evasion. What can be done to help the city child through the school agency?

THE SCHOOL AS AN EGO-SUPPORTING INSTITUTION

Horace once stated: "No one lives content with his condition" - and, of course, the failing student least of all. Failure for the student drives home a deep awareness of limitations, and this is a condition that is not acceptable. The school cannot assume or demand compliance or resignation to failure. In doing something about it, the student may resort to fantasy or to direct action via violence or vandalism. Insurance underwriters report that the juvenile firebug's targets most frequently include schools and churches. If the school is not burned down, it's windows are pockmarked - mute evidence of discontent. Replacement of windows in Boston school buildings last year totaled a record of $108,000. The deputy of the School Building Department has already estimated that "the damages for this year will exceed $140,000, if the present pace continues." But what of the fantasies? These may be even more frightening to contemplate than the vandalisms!

The most direct and effective way to strengthen the school as an ego-supporting institution is to upgrade the interpersonal relationships between teacher and students. It is the teacher who generally enjoys the

most intimate and continuing relationship with the child outside the home and family circle. Through the powerful instrument of this relationship, the teacher can do much to promote, via the normal educational processes, better mental health and emotional growth. To achieve this he must be a mature adult, committed to his responsibility of helping children and youth, and present a positive image with which to identify.

Many pupils from within the inner city, however, come to regard their teachers as phonies and frauds. Unless the teacher is secure in his subject matter, unless he himself lives out the objectives and goals toward which he is leading his pupils, and unless he is truly accepting and respecting of his pupils as persons, he will never develop a relationship that will provide the hero model with whom a pupil might identify. "Who wants to be like you?" is not an easy question for any teacher to answer.

Every teacher faces the same basic problem. He must define and maintain his role as a mature professional. Teachers in a big-city school system usually operate in a cumbersome bureaucracy. Surrounded by administrators, supervisors, and specialists, they often become uncertain of their own functions and the extent and direction of their own responsibility. Of particular significance is the National Education Association study on pupil misbehavior indicating that a substantially larger proportion of teachers in large school districts than teachers in small school districts felt that they lacked the rights and authority needed to maintain effective control over pupils.[8] This same study found that those teachers who felt that they had the necessary authority did have better-behaved pupils and fewer troublemakers in their classes.

It may well be that teachers in larger school districts, as compared with those in smaller districts, are less likely to have an important voice in determining the discipline policies of their school. Consideration should be given to including teachers of larger school units in any discussions related to policies and practices for handling problems of school discipline and social inadaptation.

On a subliminal level, teachers constantly face the problem of resolving conflicts arising between their school-organization role and their teacher-helper role. The organization commitment pulls in the direction of the enforcement and maintenance of standards of achievement, of speech, dress, and behavior; but the teacher-helper commitment demands assistance for the young learner in terms of his basic needs within the reality setting of his milieu.

For example, in assisting the slow learner or near-failure, the teacher-helper provides the pupil with individual instruction and emotional support, but at the end of the marking period, the organization role may force the teacher to fail the pupil in spite of the learning effort expended or the extenuating circumstances of the pupil's learning difficulties. Such a situation may lead to hostility directed at the very pupil the teacher has been trying to help, but who also precipitated the role conflict. In working with socially inadapted youth in particular, the teacher must be conscious of the problems he faces in experiencing this type of role conflict.

Many teachers in big-city systems today indicate strong job dissatisfaction and low self-concept, which often tend to reduce their

frustration tolerance. It is difficult to tell whether the figures on pupil misbehavior in big schools and big districts reflect, in fact, a true difference in the incidence of social inadaptation between big-city pupils and small-city pupils or whether they merely reflect significant differences between irritability levels of city teachers and teachers employed in smaller schools and smaller communities. The fact is that many teachers today appear in an angry and hostile mood. This is especially manifest in the teacher's relationship with the reluctant and recalcitrant learners. The frequent cry for sterner and harsher measures in dealing with these pupils and for their removal from the regular classroom or exclusion from school would indicate that many educators are now more concerned with the reputation of their institutions than with the welfare and well-being of the offending students.

Some teachers unconsciously fear their disturbed or disturbing pupils and resent their presence in the classroom. In relating to these children, the teacher may find forgotten fears of the past suddenly unlatched by a chance remark or episode. These unresolved threats and hidden anxieties can blind and deafen the teacher to classroom realities or they can paralyze him temporarily. Sensing the precipitant of this recall process, the teacher may strike back at the pupil, using him as a symbol of the earlier offender. At times, the teacher may also try to work out or resolve his old problems through the problem behavior of his students.

In most classrooms, the cognitive aspects of life experience and the learning process are played up and the emotional aspects are played down. We understress the emotional life of the pupil until his difficulties are so pronounced that this dimension can no longer be denied.

The teacher generally does not trust emotions - his own or those of his pupils. He only seeks to repress or ignore them.

The major problem that all youth face is how to cope with adults (teachers and principals in schools and classrooms.) The major task of most pupils at all grade levels is to please the teacher or, to state it negatively, not to displease him. There are many ways to displease the teacher: failing to do your homework, speaking disrespectfully, acting too grown-up, asking too many questions, wanting to know all the answers.

In this one-sided classroom encounter between pupil and teacher in the big-city school, the young learner is ultimately forced either to submit, to retreat and regress, or to put up a fight and perhaps rebel. The rebellion can easily take the delinquency route. Delinquent behavior, often a precocious form of adult behavior, evokes fear, complaint, and retaliation from adults in school and classroom. Teachers who are accepting and unafraid of their pupils will not submerge them, but will allow them the freedom to live and to learn. This will demand teachers who have an authentic look and sound. Since failure and dislike for schoolwork are characteristic of many delinquents, and since the delinquent often show little capacity to work toward deferred educational goals, the school should provide immediate reward for effort. This can be achieved (1) if the school can implement the supermarket principle based on the theory that the more the pupil has to choose from, the more likely he is to discover what he needs and likes, and (2) if the school can dissect learning into small units based on the students' need for success -

the success principle serving as failure prevention. The hard standardization of classroom tasks and the limitations of personal choice in courses of study unnecessarily limit individual choice and personal expression. At the same time, careful segmentation of educational tasks, best illustrated in the frames of programmed instruction, renders each lesson a manageable task for the student. If the youngster is not deterred constantly in speaking and writing by demands for grammatical excellence and if the inputs are not clogged by a deluge of course material, the classroom can provide experience in learning without a constant experience in failure.

L'ENVOI

The large urban communities did not invent the delinquent and the socially inadapted child. The fact remains, however, that city schools now hold - and are likely to continue to hold - the largest segment of a nation's disturbed and disturbing youth population. In helping these youngsters to achieve academic success and find more acceptable modes of adjustment, municipal authorities will need to work more and more through the schools and classrooms; the most effective and economical way to help youth is by making good schools better schools. This, in turn, will call for teachers who are more effective as persons and as professionals.

Writing in the introduction to August Aichorn's much reprinted Wayward Youth, Freud referred to the "three impossible professions." "In my youth," he stated, "I accepted it as a byword that the three impossible professions are teaching, healing, and governing..."

At no time in American history has teaching appeared more impossible than now- whether in affluent suburbia or within the dis-

advantaged inner city or rural community. The American ideal or dream - perhaps even the American complex - of a compulsory classroom containing every man's child and somehow promising educational growth and attainment for all youngsters, including disadvantaged, disengaged, delinquent, and disturbed, is now being tested out as fantasy or reality.

There is much more that teachers can do to make it a better reality.

FOOTNOTES

2. Ceccaldi, M. "LA Phenomene des Bandes." Revue Penitentaire et de Droit Penal. April - June, 1961

3. Saari, E. "Delinquency as a Symptom of later Social Maladjustment." Acta Academiae Paedogogica Jyvaskyloensis, VI.Jyvaskyla: Jyvaskyian Yliopistoyhdistyksen Kustantama, 1951

4. Christie, N. Ung Norske Lovovertredere. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1960.

5. Vatavia M. Paper presented at International Center for Childhood, Paris, France, December, 1961

6. National Education Association, "Teacher Opinion on Pupil Behavior, 1955- 1956." Research Bulletin, 34, April, 1956

7. Illinois Youth Commission. Biennial Report of the Youth Commission, 1957-1958, Springfield, 1959

8. National Education Association, "Teacher Opinion on Pupil Behavior, 1955-1956." Research Bulletin, 34, April, 1956

Discussant

MR. RHODY McCOY
New York City Board of Education

There was mention of the school as being an ego-destroying institution as well as possibly an ego-building institution. It's quite a job to overcome the detrimental aspect as well as to try to implement the positive aspect. There were two very important aspects of this discussion that I would like to address myself to.

One is the teacher. Now, I can't, from my experience, give enough importance to the role of the teacher. What we need to do is to assist the teachers in many, many aspects, and I'd like to start with the teacher training institutions. I feel that if we are to assume this tremendous responsibility for the social problems of the community in which we live, particularly a big city like New York, then we must obviously be able to provide a structure that can combat this problem. And in this structure must be some degree of security as well as consistency for teachers. Therefore, I think that in the teacher training institutions, as well as in the schools, ample time must be allowed to change the role of the teacher. Despite tremendous changes in educational programs, the teacher is still put in the conventional kind of situation where he must get across to youngsters basic knowledges and skills for which he is graded. In working with the delinquent and pre-delinquent, and those youngsters who have delinquent tendencies, the most important thing that the teachers can do is to develop positive relationships with these youngsters

because without them there's not going to be any learning.

We have seen in an experimental program with Teachers College a tremendous change in attitude on the part of youngsters toward school; along with that, they begin to want to learn. But this whole thing operates in an atmosphere of relating well to teachers.

But the supervisors, too, must look at this problem of delinquency and education in the urban schools with a view of changing. Too often, many of us find ourselves being hamstrung by policy, but I think we too are guilty of an evasive tactic. We have to stand up as we're asking the teachers to do, and come to grips with the problem. I can recall, in a recent district superintendents' meeting, one of the principals saying that the principal should be the head of the school and have complete authority. Many heads were bowed and questions were asked, because we don't have that kind of authority. We don't have it because we don't take it and exercise it.

In this kind of setting, working with these kinds of youngsters, we've got to take all of the negatives and convert them into positives in terms of change, in terms of working with teachers, providing them with adequate resources, developing atmospheres that youngsters want to learn in so that they will want to learn in so that they will want to come to school, and working with parents, if we are to succeed in keeping these youngsters in school.

Right now there are limited alternatives for school, like truancy and dropping out, and we would like to convert them into more

positive kinds of alternatives. So, a system like ours has to look to the teacher training institutions as well as to the institutions that train supervisors, so that we can develop criteria, consistency, and an atmosphere where these youngsters can begin to learn and re-awaken an interest in school.

Recently I had occasion to sit with a parent who blamed the school for all of the child's problems. She blamed ineffective teachers and other aspects of the school. In order to establish an atmosphere of helping and working with these youngsters, there is the whole area of re-educating parents and getting them involved in some degree. I don't know what that degree is at this point, but it will vary with what is going on in a particular school. Parents probably, for the most part, are the best teachers. So, if we can reorient the parents of youngsters who are now in school, and who have problems, we may be able to get them back into a positive channel. Their approach may help the schools with the youngsters. The school may then become an ego-building structure.